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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0477  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 0503  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY 0577  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 DILI 000424

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR EAP/MTS  
PACOM FOR POLAD AND JOC  
NSC FOR HOLLY MORROW  
SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KPKO](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [AU](#) [TTPGOV](#) [CASC](#) [PREF](#) [KJUS](#) [TT](#)

SUBJECT: REDUCED VIOLENCE IN DILI, BUT SERIOUS PROBLEMS REMAIN

REF: DILI 404

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: During the last week there was a significant reduction in the gang-related incidents reported in reftel, but late last week there were several serious incidents and the potential for renewed gang activity remains. Although some of the factors contributing to the resumption of gang violence seen in early August were one-time occurrences, more important underlying factors have not been eliminated or even effectively reduced. These include the continued displacement of much of the population of Dili, the complicated community tensions that prevent their easy return, and the phenomenon of youth gangs with a seemingly endless appetite for confrontation. Several key developments appear to have reined in the gang disturbances: community-level reconciliation and negotiation efforts have reduced conflict in some areas; the President and others have engaged the primary gang leaders and convinced them to suspend the violence for the time being; and international police have adjusted their tactics to respond more effectively to gang incidents. However, the current reprieve is fragile and a number of potential flash points, such as developments in high-profile legal cases, could lead to a resumption of these kinds of disturbances. End summary.

Significant reduction in gang activity, but problems continue  
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¶2. (U) There was a significant reduction of gang activity in Dili over the last week, until late last week when there were several large-scale incidents. At a security briefing early in the week, international forces reported that the weekend was the calmest they had seen in some time. The most recent situation report from the Australian Federal Police noted that "things have remained relatively calm over the last twenty four hours." Nonetheless, flare-ups continued during the week, particularly in several chronic problem neighborhoods. Specific neighborhoods identified as continually problematic include:

Comoro, Bebonuk, Quintal Boot, Fatu Hada and Surik Mas. In addition, while districts remain stable for the most part, there was a clash between fringe group Colimau 2000 and a martial arts group, Persaudaraan Setia Hati Terate (PSHT, also colloquially known as SH or "seti hati") in Ermera district over the weekend that reportedly resulted in up to four deaths. This incident is still being confirmed. This followed a clash between the same two groups in Covalima district about two weeks ago that resulted in one death.

13. (U) Last Thursday afternoon, August 17, the security situation appeared to take a turn for the worse when a large group of young men waged a sustained stone-throwing attack on the internally displaced persons (IDP) camp adjacent to Obrigado Barracks, the headquarters of the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL). UNOTIL personnel called the Joint Task Force (JTF) which sent a number of military and police personnel to the camp. The attackers fled and the international forces remained for several hours. However, Friday morning at about 5 a.m. there was another attack on the camp, involving not only stones but also several plastic bottles filled with gasoline. Finally, there were numerous reports Thursday night of disturbances in the vicinity of an IDP camp adjacent to the Dili port. These incidents reportedly involved youths from within the camp throwing rocks at passing cars and pedestrians. Similar events have been reported at this camp for several weeks, but they had reportedly subsided until these most recent incidents.

14. (U) According to Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) Sukehiro Hasegawa, about 2000 of the 7000 Obrigado camp residents left as a result of the attacks on the camp. Some of these reportedly left even before the first attack, apparently because they had advance warning. A Catholic nun who runs one of the largest IDP camps in Dili told Ambassador on Friday (August 18) that her seriously overcrowded camp had received many new families last night, most of whom had moved from the Obrigado camp or the camp adjacent to the port.

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15. (U) Despite these incidents, international police continue to describe the security situation in Dili as stable on the whole. In conversations with Emboff on Friday, Australian Federal Police (AFP) and Portuguese Republican National Guard (GNR) sources emphasized that this does not translate to an absence of incidents, but rather to a reduced overall number. Moreover, they note that the incidents in the last day or so do not exhibit the coordination seen earlier this month when multiple incidents occurred nearly simultaneously.

Increased understanding of underlying causes  
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16. (SBU) The early August resumption of high levels of gang violence in Dili prompted a renewed effort on the part of international security forces and others to examine and address the underlying causes both of this recent spike and of the long-term phenomenon of gang violence. Our current analysis highlights the following factors as being particularly important:

-- The early August spike in violence corresponded with the initial period during which international police took on full responsibility for Dili security operations, including the key night-time hours previously covered by the military. International police sources believe that the transition was seen as a window of opportunity and that some gangs wanted to test the readiness of the international police. Tactics used included staging a large number of disturbances in one area to draw police resources away from another area, as well as drawing patrol cars into a neighborhood and then surrounding and targeting the police.

-- The arrest of dissident military police leader Major Alfredo Reinado continued to be a motivating factor among the explicitly Loromonu (western) oriented gangs. As reported in septels,

Reinado has gained a certain status as a "hero of the West". His detention while a range of other actors remain free is viewed by many Timorese, including some youth gang elements, as fundamentally one-sided and unjust.

-- Contacts working in the IDP camps, as well as international police, report that a significant number of people from the East (Lorosa'e), including gang elements, have returned to Dili in recent weeks. Many have taken up residence in existing IDP camps, including but not limited to the camp in the port area, and a large number of the recent incidents were initiated by gangs operating out of the camps.

-- The youth gang phenomenon is one that many Embassy sources argue should be receiving greater attention. A significant proportion of male youth (generally defined as anyone who grew up under the 1975-1999 Indonesian occupation) are affiliated with some kind of gang organization, whether one of the many martial arts groups or other groups, typically organized around a charismatic leader. Many of the active gang members are unemployed and easily mobilized toward gang pursuits. Some of the gangs are explicitly Loromonu or Lorosa'e (western or eastern) but many, especially the more established ones, have no such orientation. While the gangs are not a new phenomenon, the current situation has created more space within which they can operate, jockey for influence, and settle old scores. Sources who have followed the gang phenomenon closely observe that their recent activities were highly organized and that the key leaders retain the ability both to initiate and to suspend gang violence.

-- Although the overall improvement in security since June is significant, many underlying issues remain substantially unaddressed. These include the continued displacement of over half of the city's population; the widespread existence of conflicting land and property claims that have emerged as a major factor in community conflict; uncertainty about what security arrangements will be in place at the local level; a

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widespread perception that perpetrators of violence are able to act with impunity as many are released within hours or days if arrested at all; and the continued lack of economic opportunity that is believed to make gang membership so attractive to many young men.

#### Explaining the reduction in violence

17. (SBU) Explanations of the tapering off of gang activity that we have seen over the last week vary, but the most significant developments appear to be as follows:

-- An increase in community reconciliation efforts in a number of neighborhoods in Dili has had some impact on reducing tensions. This has included reconciliation meetings initiated by government officials, by civil society organizations, and in some cases by community members themselves. In one area of Comoro, an Embassy staff member described ongoing discussions involving village chiefs and local youth coordinators that have resulted in a significant reduction of tensions. The Ministries of Labor and Interior have also initiated a series of dialogues at the aldeia (hamlet) level. In a conversation with Emboff, the Malaysian police commander noted his pleasant surprise that these meetings, while seemingly not substantive, were followed by significantly reduced incidents.

-- Initiatives to engage the leaders of gangs involved in the violence appear to have, at least in the short term, convinced many to suspend their campaigns of intimidation and violence. This has included efforts by some of the international forces to open lines of communication with gang leaders. However, perhaps most influential have been efforts made by President Xanana Gusmao to engage the leaders, who see themselves not just as gang leaders but as leaders of a broader youth demographic that has been marginalized both politically and economically. Gusmao

has met with a number of the "youth leaders" over the past weeks. After a meeting last week between the President and a number of these "leaders" one of those most prominently associated with recent incidents, Joao Becora, appeared on television to appeal to the youth to unite and resist being politically motivated to commit violence.

-- International police have adjusted their tactics to respond more effectively to the gang disturbances. For example, following an incident in which a patrol car was surrounded and had to be extracted, incident response teams now generally comprise at least two vehicles and six to eight officers, including one or two with long-barreled weapons. In addition, military patrols have been brought back into use as a deterrent measure in certain hotspot areas, especially IDP camps that have been the site of repeated incidents. However, contacts in the international forces admit that their actions are only getting at the surface issues. Our sources note that adjusted police tactics do not explain the reduced violence. In fact, we continue to see evidence that the Dili gangs do not view the presence of international forces, whether military or police, as a serious deterrent to their activities. Rather, it is a reality to which they adjust their tactics.

18. (SBU) Comment: While there is optimism that community dialogues and engagement of youth gang leaders can continue to contribute to reduced violence, the organizations and capabilities remain in place. Both leaders and members have demonstrated that they are generally short-sighted in their planning and can be easily set off by perceived injustices. There are a number of outstanding issues that have the potential to spark renewed large-scale gang activity. This is particularly true of possible developments in high-profile legal cases, including the cases against former Prime Minister Mari Alkatiri, former Minister of Interior Rogerio Lobato, and dissident armed forces Major Alfredo Reinado. End comment.  
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